

Harrisburg: Pennsylvania's Capital City

As AMERICAN communities go, Harrisburg, the capital of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, is an old community.

The Indians, using the Susquehanna River and the natural trails along it, settled the area long before the white man came. As early as 1690 William Penn, to advertise his Province, offered a settlement "upon the river of Susquehannagh." White traders came soon afterwards.

Just before 1700 John Harris, born in Yorkshire, England, probably about 1673, and a brewer by occupation, landed in Philadelphia. In 1705 he secured a license to obtain land, and sometime between then and 1718 he arrived in the wilderness of what was to become Harrisburg. He prospered as a trader, farmer, and ferryboat operator, and he was highly respected by both white settlers and Indians. In 1720 he married Esther Say, a native of Yorkshire, in Philadelphia.

Harris died in December of 1748, and together with his Negro slave Hercules and a Harris daughter is buried in River Park in front of the John Harris Mansion, Front and Washington streets, built by his son in 1766.

The second John Harris, one of four Harris children, was born in October, 1726, and is known as the founder of Harrisburg. He planned the city with his son-in-law, William Maclay, member from Pennsylvania of the first United States Senate, and laid out the lots on April 14, 1785. Harris married twice and had at least five children. He died July 29, 1791, and is buried in Paxton Church Cemetery in suburban Paxtang.

For a short time Harrisburg was known as "Louisburg," after King Louis XVI of France, but the second John Harris insisted it be named in memory

of his father. The second Harris helped to organize Dauphin County, which was created from part of Lancaster County on March 4, 1785, and named for the French dauphin, the king's eldest son, who died in 1789. Harrisburg from the beginning was the county seat and was incorporated as a borough, with fewer than 500 people, on April 13, 1791. It received its charter as a city on March 19, 1860, when it had a population of about 13,000.

The second Harris by deed conveyed "4 acres and 13 perches to be held in trust until the Legislature see fit to use it" as the site for the capitol. The legislature moved from Philadelphia to Lancaster in 1799, and then in February of 1810 selected Harrisburg to be the capital.

The General Assembly moved to Harrisburg in October, 1812, four months after America declared war against Great Britain. Simon Snyder, of Selinsgrove, was governor and the State had a budget of \$336,189.15. Temporary quarters were used, and in 1819 Governor William Findlay, of Cumberland County, laid the cornerstone of the first Capitol. This two-story brick building lasted until February 2, 1897, when it was gutted by a noontime blaze.

The new Capitol was expected to cost between \$5 and \$10 million, but by the time it opened in 1906 it had cost \$12.5 million, about a third of which went for graft. Five persons, including the architect and the chief contractor, received prison sentences in the famous 1908 Capitol graft trial held in the Commonwealth Court in Harrisburg; however \$4 million of graft, including the \$850 spent for a \$150 flagpole atop the building, was never recovered.

The present Capitol was dedicated October 4, 1906, by President Theodore Roosevelt, who said it was a handsome structure. Governor Samuel W.



Harrisburgers gather in a snowstorm on the afternoon of February 2, 1897, to watch the State Capitol burn. The present Capitol stands where the old one stood.

Pennypacker, under whose administration it was built, contended it was a masterpiece, but Owen Wister, the novelist from Philadelphia, at the time wrote: "The Capitol is not a good work. Outside it looks as much like all other capitols as any banana looks like the rest of the bunch. Inside it is a monstrous botch of bad arrangement, bad lighting, bad ventilation, and the most bloated bad tastes."

The most impressive features of the Capitol today are the twenty-seven Barnard figures in two groups at each side of its entrance. These were done by George Grey Barnard in Paris, brought to Harrisburg in eighteen railroad cars and unveiled October 4, 1911. Barnard, a native of Bellefonte, Centre County, and the originator of New York's Cloisters, a museum of medieval art and architecture, died in 1938 and requested he be buried in Harrisburg, near his most famous work; indeed, he was.

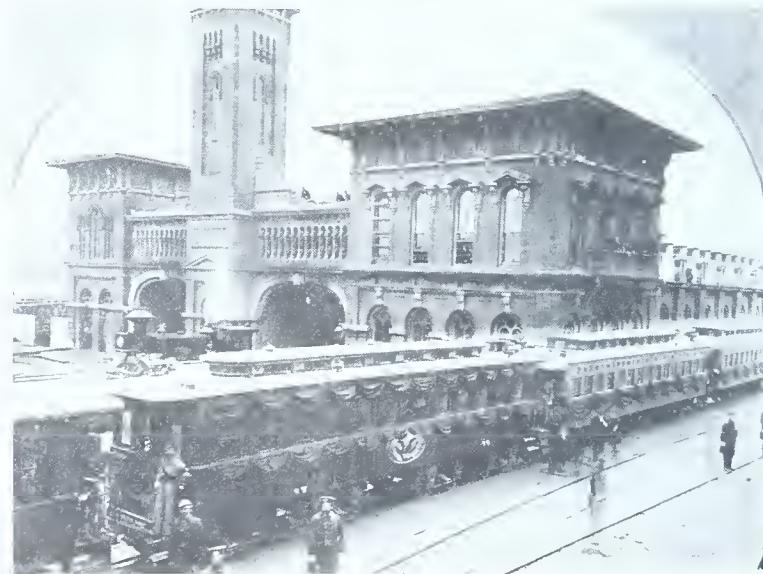
The two most distinguished buildings of the Capitol complex are the State Education Building and Forum and the William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building.

The Education Building and Forum, costing \$5.5 million, was dedicated by Governor Gifford Pinchot on November 4, 1931. On October 2, 1930, just before construction was completed, it suffered a \$1 million fire, one of the most serious in Harrisburg

history. Chinese wood oil on the ceiling canvas, which depicts the constellations of the northern sky, caught fire and almost destroyed the building. When it was eventually completed, the Forum, seating 1,833, was praised by critics. Its seven great historical maps, each thirty-five by twenty-one feet, tell world history to World War I.

The \$10 million State museum was built in the administration of Governor David L. Lawrence and was dedicated by Governor William W. Scranton. One of its principal features is an eighteen-foot-high, 3,800-pound modern statue of William Penn, by Janet deCoux, of Pittsburgh. Another showplace, decorated with period furnishings, is the Governor's Residence, of Georgian design, occupied first by Governor Raymond P. Shafer and his family in 1968. It is located at Maclay and Front streets.

Each January hundreds of thousands visit the Pennsylvania Farm Show, a major agricultural exhibition in Harrisburg. The Farm Show buildings, the first of which was dedicated by the Commonwealth in 1931, are located at Maclay and Cameron streets.



President Lincoln's funeral train in the Pennsylvania Railroad station, Harrisburg, on the morning of April 22, 1865, as seen from Market Street. In the foreground is the presidential car, which carried Lincoln's remains to Illinois for burial. While the President's body was taken in procession to the Capitol to be viewed, that of his son Willie, who died in 1862, remained in this car. The present passenger station was opened on the site of this one in 1887.

Historically, Harrisburg has been important not only because of its Capitol, but also because it has long been a transportation center.

On March 27, 1824, during the first term of Governor John Andrew Shulze, the Pennsylvania Canal system was authorized. Ground was broken for the canal July 4, 1826, just to the east of the Capitol. The canal system was exciting, but because of the railroad it was short-lived. Between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh it was in use in its entirety only between 1834 and 1857, the Pennsylvania Railroad having extended its service between the cities in 1852.

What was to become a part of the Pennsylvania Railroad, a rail line from Lancaster, was extended to Harrisburg in 1837. The third and present railroad station, now of the Penn Central, was opened downtown in 1887. Through the city passed the funeral trains of Presidents Lincoln and McKinley. The most important railroad event in Harrisburg occurred January 15, 1938, with the arrival of the first electric train. Prior to then, coal-burners chugged the length of Harrisburg, enveloping the city in soot and smoke.

Because of its proximity to Washington, Harrisburg in December of 1839 was the convention city of the Whig Party. Harrisburg is the smallest city to have been the site of a national political convention. The Whigs met at the newly built Zion Lutheran Church, on Fourth Street south of Market, and nominated William Henry Harrison, who was elected president.

Harrisburg was a target of General Robert E. Lee's 1863 Confederate invasion, not because it was the State capital but because it was a transportation hub. The city also had Camp Curtin, a recruiting and hospitalization area for Union troops. During the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and succeeding conflicts, the Harrisburg area served as a recruiting and debarking center for the military.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike, the nation's first long-distance toll road, was authorized during the administration of Governor George H. Earle. The roadway, complete from Middlesex in Cumberland County west to Irwin, was opened October 1, 1940. In the late 1940's and early 1950's, before the national Interstate highway program, Harrisburg was



Market Square, Harrisburg, 1880, looking north, showing the market houses, which were razed in 1889 to relieve congestion; the hotel building to the right, which still stands; and the horse car tracks.

one of the three cities in the nation to have access to as many as five major highways. The Appalachian Trail, a 2,000-mile hikers' path from Maine to Georgia, crosses the Susquehanna River just north of Harrisburg.

Bridges have been important to Harrisburg. Old Camelback, an undulating covered bridge, was built by Theodore Burr in 1816. Charles Dickens crossed it in 1842 and described it in his *American Notes*. Two columns of the old Capitol stand at the Harrisburg entrance of the covered bridge's present successor, the Market Street Bridge.

President George Washington passed through Harrisburg in 1794 on his way west to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. He spent the night at the Harris Mansion or at a hotel on the southeast corner of Market Square. Abraham Lincoln, as president-elect, went to the same site but never got a chance to sleep. With rumors that he faced assassination, he was hustled out of Market Square and taken to a darkened train headed for Washington. That afternoon of February 22, 1861, Lincoln had addressed the legislature. He returned to Harrisburg for a last time on April 21, 1865, then to lie in state in the House of Representatives as the martyr of the Civil War.

With 1,100 acres of park, Harrisburg once had more parks per square mile than any other city in the nation, the most notable now being River Park, which extends several miles along the Susquehanna. The Harris and Cameron families, among others, contributed to the park system. Under the administration of Vance McCormick, who became mayor in 1902 at age 29, the park system, as well as an outstanding water system supplied by reservoirs, was established. McCormick, who died in 1946, was the publisher of the Harrisburg *Patriot* for 42 years, and founded the *Evening News* in 1917.

Many of the pioneers of the Harrisburg area were Scotch-Irish and English, one reason why Presbyterianism is still deeply rooted in the community. Pennsylvania Germans also moved into the area. Seventeen of Harrisburg's twenty-nine mayors since it became a city in 1860 have been of German ancestry. Chicken corn soup remains a popular dish. The Irish came to Harrisburg to build the canal and the railroad, and they were joined by many Central Europeans, a large number of whom settled in nearby Steelton. Although Negroes have lived in Harrisburg since its earliest days, many of them came the first thirty years of the twentieth century to work in steel mills. With fair-employment practices in State government, Negro employment has increased greatly since the mid-1950's. The growth of State government, the city's largest industry, has attracted thousands of people from all parts of the State, and from other parts of the country.

The city has had numerous famous personages. The family of Simon Cameron made Harrisburg its home. For 127 years until 1968, the Cameron Estates had property within the city. Some of its land is now used by the Harrisburg Area Community College, founded in 1964 and established in Wildwood Park in 1967. General Simon Cameron (he was State adjutant general at one time) served ten months as secretary of war under President Lincoln. This long-time boss of the Pennsylvania Republican party lived in the Harris Mansion from 1863 until his death, at age 90, in June, 1889. Grandchildren of Cameron gave the home to the Historical Society

of Dauphin County in 1941. The mansion is now an excellent museum, having letters of Lincoln, the Camerons, the Marquis de Lafayette, and others.

James Buchanan and Thaddeus Stevens, as well as later figures like Senators Matthew S. Quay and Boies Penrose, came to Harrisburg as State legislators.

John O'Hara, a native of Pottsville, lived in Harrisburg briefly to write his novel about the city,



Members of the Harrisburg Wheel Club pose in Market Square in 1888. The camera faces west down Market Street to the Market Street covered bridge. Long bicycle excursions were popular with Harrisburgers in the years before and after the turn of the century.

A Rage to Live, published in 1949. Harrisburg, disguised as Fort Penn, appears also in other O'Hara novels. Conrad Richter, a native of Pine Grove, lived for a time in Clarks Valley and used the Harrisburg region as a setting for part of his *The Light in the Forest* in 1953. James Boyd, a resident of Front Street, wrote a novel about the city in 1935, *Roll River*.

As the capital of the Commonwealth, Harrisburg has a history and a character that reflects more than just the lives and achievements of its own citizens. It has had a larger role as the focal point for much of the history of the whole State.